

Jephthah

God Will Open

Introduction

“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman. Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him” (Judges 11:1-3).

Jephthah means, “he will open”, and is closely related to a word defining that God will open. Throughout this book we will discuss how Jephthah became an opening for life and fruitfulness to flourish in Israel for a season. The Lamb opens the door for God’s Life to flow into the people of God, and Jephthah became a vessel through whom that Life could be poured out.

Jephthah is the ninth Judge in the Book of Judges. He is introduced as a mighty man of valor AND the son of a harlot. Look at this contrast! This account of Jephthah speaks of a man, even an outcast, who in his rejection found the Lamb of God and became conformed to His image. Jephthah went through many things to be prepared for his ultimate victory. There is so much we can learn from his story if we will allow the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ our Life in all these things. Jephthah can be a picture to us of the preciousness of the Gospel, wherein Christ becomes all in and through earthen vessels.

Trained Outside The Camp

Jephthah was born of the wrong stuff and was considered to be a “bad seed” for he was the son of a harlot. He was cast out from his father’s house and hated by his own brothers. He was rejected and despised of those closest to him and forced to dwell in a foreign land among strangers. All of this could look like the worst possible training for a mighty man of valor, yet it was through these very elements that Jephthah found the living God.

Being pushed and pressed outside the camp can bless the seeking heart. This is what the scriptures in the Book of Hebrews speaks of, “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Hebrews 13:13). In this scripture the Lamb is found suffering for the people outside the gate of the camp. To know the Lord in conformity to His death and that we might fellowship in His suffering may require going forth unto Him to the place of His Cross. The place of discovering the nature of the sacrificial Lamb Himself may well be far removed from the common classroom of religious training. The way of the Lamb may be more purely known in the place of His rejection, where He was despised and accursed by His own. Quite possibly Jephthah began to know the Lord in this way. In his own personal rejection and shame, Jephthah may have found the value of

the God who receives the ungodly and gives them His Life. He may never have discovered God in this way dwelling among his brothers in Israel. Their cruelty and lack of knowledge may have crowded him into a situation of finding God in a far greater way than he would have otherwise ever known.

Interestingly enough, with some of the Old Testament offerings, the very body of the sacrifice whose blood was sprinkled towards or brought within the temple and used to sanctify the people was burned outside the camp (Heb. 13:11-13, Lev. 4:4-12). This information can help us understand how God may have been preparing Jephthah as a vessel that would conform to the image of Christ outside the camp and eventually be brought back into the congregation to willingly give his life for the very ones who had rejected him from their presence.

“Bad Seed” Will Receive “God’s Seed”

“Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob” (Judges 11-3).

Do you feel like an outcast to your own mind’s demands for righteousness? In that sense, do you feel like the son of a harlot too? We can tend to despise the weaknesses that the Father USES to manifest the strength and glory of Christ in us. All men must become convinced that their own “gene pool” could never produce the promised Seed. We must know that in ourselves and apart from union into Christ, we all belong cast out from the Father’s place of favor.

There may come a time for some of us when we find ourselves dwelling in “Tob”, a place where we feel removed from the people of God and rejected because of our own lack. At such a time some may come to know from deep within the utter darkness of what we are apart from Christ. The depth of our own existence apart from Christ can feel like a black-hole swallowing us up in the darkness of being found outside of Him. This can become a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, or the very heart condition from which we receive the Light of Christ Who gives us His Life! At such a time we can turn our hearts from ourselves to find that His glory will shine out from our darkness (II Cor. 4:6). Sometimes it is in our darkest hour that we discover the gloriousness of this gospel and the dearness of the Son who dwells within. He becomes precious to those who comprehend the depth of their own need.

The scriptures do not say that light shines out from light, so if we call our darkness light then we will miss the wonder of God shining into our hearts the light of His Life. In reality we are rejecting the Son Who was sent to give us the light of Life (Jn. 1:4, Jn. 8:12). I would rather be outside the camp confronted with my own darkness than sitting in the middle of Israel calling my darkness light. Outside the camp I may find the Lamb as my light and conform to His image. When we acknowledge that we are darkness, we can also know that Christ will shine out from our darkness (II Cor. 4:6) In this sense our end can become His beginning. Have we found the place of our personal rejection the very same place Christ becomes all our righteousness and life?

Jesus said that the poor in spirit are blessed. The greatest blessing the Father could give us is that His Son replaces our inward poverty with the richness of His Life. Woe to those who are born rich in themselves, born “right”, and born of a “good” seed rather than being born of the very Seed of God Himself. They have no hunger, no thirst, and no need for Another Life. At times we may spurn, reject, and cast out “from the father’s house” the ones we deem hopeless, even as Jephthah’s brothers did. Yet in reality we may be casting them into the arms of Jesus where they will discover the richness of His grace. Those without hope in themselves will find Christ alone as their hope of bringing God glory. Those who have truly died in their own hearts to their own righteousness will embrace Christ beyond doctrinal agreement. They will cleave to Him with purpose of heart for He is everything to them. They have no hope of “good genes” producing acceptable fruit. They understand that outside of union with Christ, they are not the Son that abides in the father’s house. They have lost hope of fellowship with the people of God based on their own merits. It is here in this state that the Lamb finds them and ignites their hearts with His living flame. They know with certainty that the Light shining through them is the glorious life of Christ so that no flesh could ever boast.

Being Prepared For The Altar

Perhaps Jephthah is a picture of a man whose great poverty pointed him in the direction of the Lamb rather than toward seeking God for greatness and honor among men. In that sense he may have gone forth unto the Lamb outside the camp rather than seeking God for power and miracles to promote himself. As we look at God’s purposes through Israel, we can see that Jephthah’s life was set outside the camp and meant for conformity to the Lamb. During his season in Tob the Lord may have been preparing Jephthah to live sacrificially through conformity to the Lamb. God can open a door for Life to come back into the congregation if someone will yield to the indwelling Lamb nature. The Father is always looking for a heart is open and available to Him in this way. Multitudes will follow God into blessing, and many will go into battle, but few will remain on the narrow path of the Cross that requires death working in us for life to work in others (II Cor. 4:12). What Israel truly needed was not blessing or victory in battle, they needed to be sustained by life. Life only comes out from death, and the only death that is acceptable to God is that which proceeds forth from the spirit of the Lamb. If God can conform one man or woman as a vessel that will bear in their mortal flesh the dying of the Lord Jesus, then God can bring Life to a nation. God set his hand upon forming Jephthah in this way and for this purpose. This mighty man of valor was also brought to the altar where his greatest victory was wrought.

Men Gathered To Jephthah

*“And there were gathered vain men to Jephthah,
and went out with him”(Judges 11:3b).*

Cast out and vain men gathered unto Jephthah even as they would to David. The Lamb is regularly regarded as useless to those who feel sufficient and acceptable in themselves. The Lamb brings with Him a light that makes men uncomfortable unless they are desperate for Life, for He reveals our motives as He manifests God’s nature. Yet to those

who were small in their own eyes, Jephthah was a man who would love and honor them regardless. Perhaps the same hope that Jephthah found in the eyes of God for himself he also saw for these men who were cast out and rejected. A man with such a heart will inspire and draw men who would otherwise be seen as worthless. These men will love him with devotion and passion for they see him as the mercies of God Himself.

Whether it be David hiding from Saul in caves, Joseph cast into a pit from his brothers, Hannah barren and mocked by Penninah, or Jephthah rejected from his father's house as the son of a harlot; a heart that is towards the Lord will find God in the most wonderful way during these seasons, causing hard times to become so precious. Prayers come out of these times that touch the heart of the issue.

One such prayer may have been as follows: " Though I be the son of an harlot and kicked out of my father's house, God's Lamb will visit me in my wilderness and through my weakness He will bring deliverance to all of Israel. His eye will look upon me in my dung-heap and rejection, and in my foolish nothingness He will visit me with the true riches of Lamb Life. Through deep weakness and to the true outcast will come forth a deliverer that speaks of the Son of God coming forth from the barrenness of man. And though all men may spurn the weak and earthen vessel, the Father will see that which truly represents His Son among men. Thank you Lord for looking upon me in my low estate and favoring my womb to bring forth Your Son."

A Need Arises

"And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob: And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? And why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the Lord deliver them before me, shall I be your head? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The Lord be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh"
(Judges 11:4-11).

Disregarded as useless to them in their daily lives, Jephthah remained forgotten until the time of need came. For some reason he is the only one who had the ability to lead them into battle when war arose against Ammon. Although he was the son of Gilead, they had rejected his leadership and headship until they were confronted with a crisis beyond their own ability to handle. His importance to them was based on what he could do for them, and with this in mind they made him their head. Even so, Jephthah agreed to lead them in battle.

Before going into battle Jephthah tried to reason with the king of Ammon, but it was to no avail. And so, since wisdom and reasoning did not prevail, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah to fight valiantly against Ammon. It is at this time that Jephthah makes his famous vow to offer up as a burnt offering to God whatever came forth from the doors of his house to greet him if they should win. The Lord delivered Ammon into his hands and they were subdued before the children of Israel. Jephthah returned home a victor not realizing that the greatest battle and deepest victory lay directly ahead of him.

The Victory of the Altar

"And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter"
(Judges 11:30,31,34).

Jephthah went into battle by the Spirit of God being upon him, yet Jephthah would go into death by the indwelling Lamb. His greatest victory came not by the power of the Spirit but through the Life of the Lamb. This is significant because the real help that Israel needed was not the defeat of their outward enemies, but an increase of the inward Lamb coming forth. To lead Israel into this victory, Jephthah needed to be prepared not just for battle, but for the altar. As we have discussed previously, his time "outside the camp" may have been part of that preparation.

Jephthah made his vow to offer as a burnt offering to the Lord whatever first came out from his house to meet him. Having no sons and only one daughter, his only offspring came out the door first, and immediately his heart was broken. When finally a moment of joy came into his life, the path of death was instantly presented before him. Is God cruel, or had Jephthah been called to be with God in deep and precious fellowship?

Why did God allow the burnt offering to be something so costly and precious as his only child, the darling of his heart? Why would God require that? Would He not provide Himself a Lamb like He did for Abraham with Isaac? Why didn't He cause a servant or a dog to come out the door first rather than his only seed? These questions may flood our minds when we are first being confronted with this situation, yet we must look deeper in the eternal spirit of the thing to find the heart of God's purpose.

Perhaps God did provide His Lamb. Perhaps the Lamb God provided as the thank-offering was the one IN Jephthah. And for Israel's future some man had to offer the Lamb. Remember, Jesus told us that all scriptures testify of Himself (Jn. 5:39), and so we can see Christ's death, burial and resurrection foreshadowed in the Old Testament. This Old Testament Judge is helping us to understand the mystery of Christ dwelling in His Church.

Not A Loser, A Lamb

We could look upon Jephthah as someone who was born a loser, lived a life of loss, and died a loser. Even his sweet moment of victory after battle was swallowed up of loss when his daughter walked out the door. In all regards by men, a loser, yet a picture of Christ among men. How ironic the Lamb can seem the unrenewed mind.

There is a righteousness that comes from the law, and a righteousness that comes out from the barren who have found Christ as their Life. The righteousness of the law makes us feel special, but the righteousness that is Christ makes Him everything. Rather than perfecting ourselves, we conform to His image and bear the Lamb in our mortal flesh, exalting His nature in our earthiness and weakness.

In Second Corinthians 4:7-12, right after the declaration is laid forth in writing that this treasure is in earthen vessels, the scriptures discuss the state of the vessel. It says that these vessels were troubled on every side, perplexed, bearing death, and afflicted. All of this is showing us that the glory is NOT OF OURSELVES, but that our hope is the inward glory of Christ and not the outward man that is perishing daily. And so we could watch Jephthah perish through offering unto God his best, and find ourselves upset with him. We may find ourselves clapping when the Spirit of God came upon him and strengthened his flesh for a moment and account that unto him as his greatest and most glorious moment. But the word of God declares that the greatest is love (I Cor. 13), even though the hour that the Lamb manifests is many times accounted as the least and a point of shame or even punishment. It is not our flesh that we are trying to make strong, but in and through the foolishness of weak earthen vessels we are seeking to shine forth the glorious light that is Christ Who dwells in us. The Lamb is the light of the city (Rev. 21:23), and though we be darkness in ourselves we are called to shine forth the image of Christ which is most clearly expressed through His Lamb nature.

Abraham did not have to put the knife into Isaac because God stopped Him. God did not stop Jephthah. He had to look at his only daughter knowing that in his life of rejection she was possibly the only one on earth who loved him, and account the altar worthy. Even so, God allowed him to pass through this altar that life might once again flow into Israel. Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the dying of His saints (Ps. 116:15).

It is very important to understand that this story represents something that now exists through the nature of the Life of Christ that is in us. It is foreshadowing the mystery of Christ as the Life of the believer. We are not offering up things or people, but we are laying down our lives because truly the Lamb God is now providing is His Son Who lives in us.

God did not speak to Jephthah about how to get along with his mocking brothers or how to make friends with Israel. God progressively lead him deeper and deeper into the fellowship of the Lamb. His hand was upon him to bring him into conformity to Christ in death, and as one who would intimately fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. Even so,

the result of this death was seen in Israel, for they had seven years of peace and fruitfulness. We will see evidence of this in the following scriptures.

The Hidden History

“And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead. And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem”
(Judges 12:7-10).

Although we will not refer to it here, Jephthah goes through another time of persecution from the people of Israel, and ends up judging Israel for six years. Our focus in this chapter will be the things that came forth as a result of his life.

We read that the next Judge was born in Bethlehem. This is significant, for Bethlehem has always been a place of bringing forth the offspring of the Seed and the place of fruitfulness (house of bread). Ruth, Naomi, Rachel and Mary had a hard journey to get to Bethlehem, but Ibzan the king was born there. Jephthah represents the journey, for he is the one who travailed and poured out his soul that life might come again in Israel. Jephthah's daughter represents the Lamb prepared in the heart of Jephthah to be offered up to God for the nation. (Once again, in the New Covenant, the Lamb is not external to us, but dwelling within us and given through us.) Ibzan the next Judge represents the new man raised in Christ, born in Bethlehem and fruitful.

Jephthah offered up his only daughter and was left without offspring that we know of. The next Judge Ibzan ended up with sixty daughters! There was no report of war or famine during his reign, only peace and fruitfulness while Jephthah's entire life was riddled with persecution, battle, and death.

Why is it important to notice the flow from the altar between the generations? Because life comes out from death. The hidden history of Israel, and the world for that matter, is not clearly written in our history books but can only be found written in the Lamb's book of Life. Those written in the Lamb's book of Life may not be great men and woman as we would account greatness, but they are those who have yielded to the Lamb and embraced the altar. They have made a way for the Life of Christ to continue even to our generation. Their story and value may be most clearly understood through those that were fruitful because of them. It is important for us upon whom the ends of the world have come to understand the life cycle of the Lamb and our place in that cycle as the wife of the Lamb.

Conclusion

Jephthah's glory was not found in receiving honor in his lifetime, rather it was found in the fruit that came mostly after his death. But this is in line with the scriptures, for Paul himself said to the Philippians, "For you are our crown and rejoicing." Paul said that everything that he went through was for them, and not for his own benefit. God will open a way for others to be edified through the "Jephthahs" of our time who will follow the Lamb even into death that others might receive Life. Remember, the way of the Cross is God's method for victory. May we prepare our hearts, even as a Bride that wants to bear the spirit of the Lamb, her husband.***